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ABSTRACT

This performance guide provides students with an introduction to Lakota Sioux history and culture and to the dances performed by the Lakota Sioux Indian Dance Theatre. The Lakota Sioux believe that life is a sacred circle in which all things are connected, and that the circle was broken for them in 1890 by the massacre at Wounded Knee. Only in recent times is the circle becoming whole again as American Indians struggle to achieve self-determination and renew their heritage. Sioux legends and histories have been collected and published. Old skills are being used again. Dance is a central part of life, expressing belief in spirits, nature, and the relationship of all things to one another. Eight dances performed by the Lakota Sioux Indian Dance Theatre are described, along with their purposes and significance. The guide includes information about the dance company, pointers to enhance appreciation of the performance, suggestions for related student activities, and a list of related reading materials and videos. (JAT)

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CUE SHEET for Students

LAKOTA SIOUX

Indian Dance Theatre

ED 388 462

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The circle appears over and over in the culture of the Lakota Sioux. They believe that life is a sacred circle in which all things are connected—nature, animals, and humans. Sometimes Lakota Sioux refer to the circle as the Sacred Hoop. When Lakota Sioux perform the hoop dance they are doing the dance of life, seeking harmony and balance in all things.

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THE LAKOTA SIOUX: A RICH HISTORY

Welcome to *Cuesheet*, one of a series of performance guides published by the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. This *Cuesheet* is designed to be used before and after attending a performance by the Lakota Sioux Indian Dance Theatre. You may use *Cuesheet* alone or with others. Some of the suggested activities in it will be more interesting if they are done with classmates, friends, or family members.

WHAT'S IN CUESHEET?

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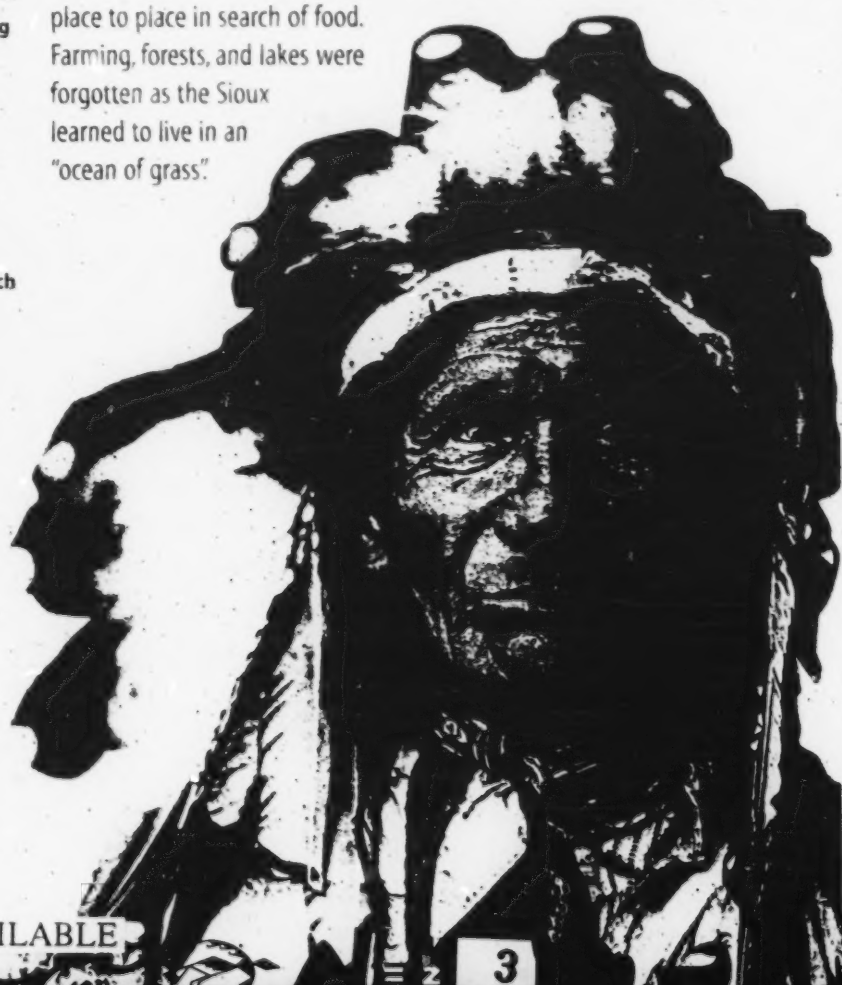
Native Americans once lived throughout what is now the United States. In 1492, when Columbus arrived in the Americas, there were about two million Native Americans living in 300 tribes.

According to scientists, **the ancestors of Native Americans came to North America from Siberia at least 20,000 years ago.** During the Ice Age, the sea level dropped, causing a land bridge to appear at the Bering Strait. Hunting buffalo and woolly mammoth, they crossed the bridge. Native Americans believe their ancestors always lived on this continent.

Large numbers of Native Americans lived on the Great Plains. The Sioux migrated there in the 1600s. They had lived along the Mississippi River as farmers and hunters in places that today are the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. When they were defeated by their American Indian enemies and when white settlers seized their land, **the Sioux had to leave their farms and hunting grounds and wander in search of a new home.** Eventually, they reached the Great Plains and learned to lead nomadic lives, moving from place to place in search of food. Farming, forests, and lakes were forgotten as the Sioux learned to live in an "ocean of grass."

COLUMBUS made a mistake when he called the natives of North America "los Indios." He believed that by sailing west from Europe far enough he would arrive somewhere in Asia. Like other Europeans, he did not know that the Americas existed. Because he thought he was sailing in the Indian Ocean when he landed at San Salvador Island in the Bahama Islands, he called the people he met "los Indios."



THE GREAT PLAINS cover more than 1,500,000 square miles. The terrain of the Great Plains varies. It has vast grasslands. It also has some rugged hills, such as the Black Hills, which are the sacred ceremonial grounds of the Sioux.

Photos cover & page 2 National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

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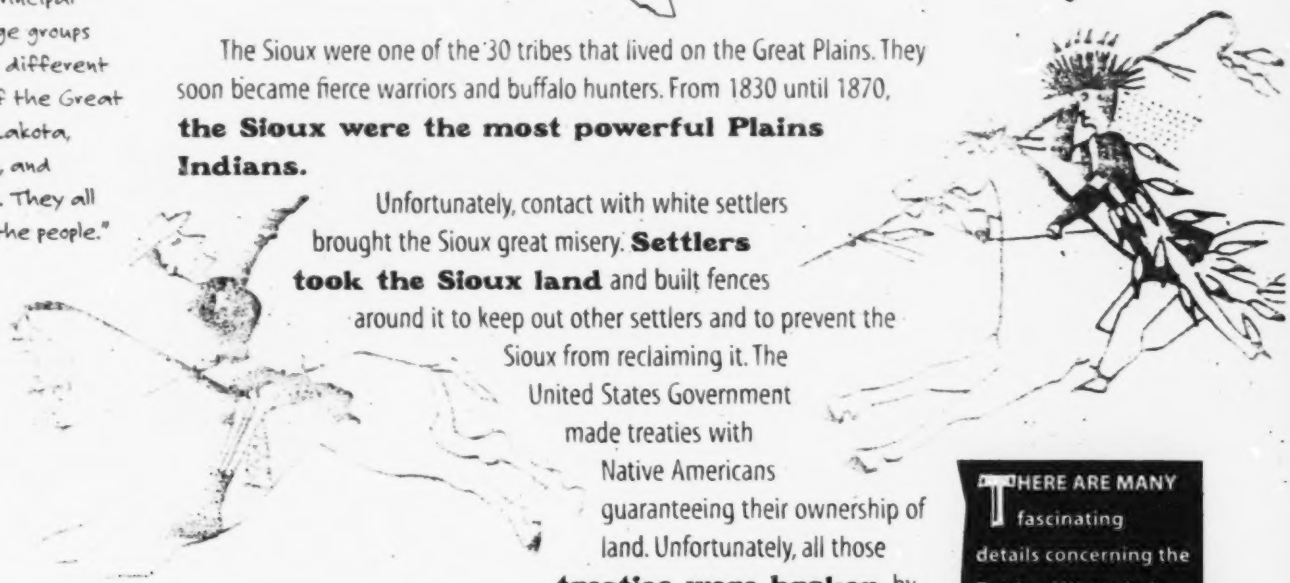
THE NAMES by which we know Native American tribes were given to them by white explorers and settlers. The Chippewa called the Sioux "Nadewisue" (nay-day-wee-soo), the word for "little snake," meaning "enemy." French explorers had difficulty saying the name and shortened it to "Sioux." The Sioux are composed of three principal language groups living in different parts of the Great Plains: Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota. They all mean "the people."

The Sioux were one of the 30 tribes that lived on the Great Plains. They soon became fierce warriors and buffalo hunters. From 1830 until 1870, **the Sioux were the most powerful Plains Indians.**



Unfortunately, contact with white settlers brought the Sioux great misery. **Settlers took the Sioux land** and built fences around it to keep out other settlers and to prevent the Sioux from reclaiming it. The United States Government made treaties with Native Americans guaranteeing their ownership of land. Unfortunately, all those **treaties were broken** by the Government. Many Sioux **died of diseases** like smallpox and measles, which the settlers brought with them and to which the Sioux were not immune. Many Sioux **died in battles** with army troops sent to control them. Like other Native Americans, they were **forced to live in poverty** on reservations.

For the Sioux, the final devastating massacre of their people occurred in 1890 at the Battle of Wounded Knee, when almost 250 men, women, and children were killed by United States soldiers. The Lakota Sioux believe that the **sacred circle of life was broken** for them at that battle, and it is only in recent times that the circle is becoming whole again.

RESERVATIONS are places set aside by federal and state governments for Indians to live on. There are about 300 reservations located in 34 states.

THERE ARE MANY fascinating details concerning the Battle of Wounded Knee. Research and explain what role the Ghost Dance played in the battle, why the battle happened, and what its results were.

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THE SACRED PIPE is the holiest of all objects for the Sioux. The wooden stem and pipestone bowl represent the American Indian's body. The tobacco in the bowl represents all living green things. The smoke that comes from the pipe represents the breath of the people, and it carries prayers to Wakan Tanka, the Creator.

PART OF THE LAND taken illegally from the Lakota Sioux is the Black Hills of South Dakota, their sacred ceremonial grounds. The tribe sued the United States government for the return of that part on which no one lives. In 1980 the Government admitted it was wrong and offered to pay millions of dollars to the tribe. The Sioux refused the money and appealed the ruling. They want only their sacred land returned. By 1994 no decision had been reached.

Today, Lakota Sioux continue to live on reservations in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Montana. Some live in Canada. However, many Lakota Sioux live, as other Americans do, in urban communities throughout the country. **Today, there are about 1,900,000 Native Americans living in the United States.**

Since 1924, when Indians were recognized as American citizens, their lives have gradually improved. But their struggle goes on. New homes and roads are being built on reservations. There are new and better schools. Over 30 tribal colleges and universities throughout the country offer programs which include the study of Native American heritage.

More and more **American Indians are claiming their civil rights.** The American Indian Movement (AIM) and other reservation-based organizations have helped to bring about change. "Self-determination," by which Indians decide how they will use the natural resources on the reservations and make other decisions for themselves, has become important.

The Sioux are sharing more and more of the pride they feel about their heritage. Sioux legends and histories have been collected and published. Old skills are used again. The Lakota Sioux Indian Dance Theatre shares an ancient culture through rituals, songs, and dances presented to audiences throughout the world.

Prayer to the Buffalo

THE NAMES of many places in the United States have American Indian names. Some of them are:

Potomac (River), Manhattan, Chicago, Appalachia, and Mississippi. Identify places in the city or state where you live that have Indian names. Find out what the names mean. Make a small dictionary of them.

SOME FAMOUS Lakota Sioux leaders were Chief Sitting Bull, Chief Red Cloud, Chief Black Elk, Chief Crazy Horse, and Chief Spotted Tail. Find out why they are remembered. Alone or with others, make a booklet in which you include their biographies and pictures. Donate your booklet to the school library or media center.

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SPIRITS AND MYTHS

SPIRITS

The Sioux pray to the Great Spirit, Wakan Tanka, who created the sacred circle of life on earth. They believe **Wakan Tanka gave power to all things.** Native Americans believe that special powers were given to many different animal spirits, such as the eagle, deer, hawk, and buffalo. Many times animal spirits were called upon during vision quests.

A boy around 12 years of age was carefully prepared by tribal elders and a medicine man to go on the first of many vision quests. He would go to a quiet and lonely place to fast, taking with him the sacred pipe. Through the vision quest he hoped to receive a message from Wakan Tanka and to gain wisdom and strength to help him be a good member of the tribe, and to understand his place in the circle of life. If the boy had a vision, he told it to the medicine man, who interpreted it for him.

Eagle Dance

THE SIOUX regard the eagle as the most powerful of birds. They also believe that it has important religious significance. Because it can fly high enough to disappear behind the clouds, the Sioux believe the eagle communicates prayers to the great spirit, Wakan Tanka. The most sacred feathers come from the eagle. Eagle feathers are used in war bonnets, and as part of dance costumes.

Feather by Sioux Indian

READ SOME Native American creation myths, for example "The White Buffalo Calf Woman." Choose one that interests you most and do one of the following to retell it: draw a set of sequential pictures record it on audiotape and share it with your friends and family act it out by yourself or with others create a dance that expresses its meaning.

FIND OUT MORE about the importance of feathers to the Lakota Sioux. What is a "coup"? Why was counting coups important to warriors? Make a set of drawings showing how feathers were worn by the Sioux to show their bravery and accomplishments in battle.

WRITE A POEM that expresses the respect Lakota Sioux feel for the eagle.

MYTHS

Myths are traditional stories passed along through oral tradition. Some myths explain how things came to exist. Some myths tell about gods and heroes. Some myths tell why people and animals behave the way they do. Different groups of people tell different myths, but many of them are similar throughout the world.

Lakota Sioux myths teach that **humans are a tiny part of a large and mysterious universe.** They also help explain the sacred circle of life. Prayer, expressed through ritual and ceremony, is the way to make sure that life on earth is good.

Among the responsibilities of the wise men of the tribe was to be keepers of tribal memories, including myths. They were also responsible for passing on how to perform rituals and ceremonies.

MEDICINE MEN are people who have received special healing power from Wakan Tanka. They are the spiritual leaders of the tribe.

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DANCES AND THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

Dance is a central part of the life of the Lakota Sioux people. They dance to express their belief in spirits, nature, and the relationship of all things to one another. They dance to share traditions. They dance to honor people. They dance in pow-wows to celebrate their culture. And they dance to enjoy themselves.

Native American dancers dance in honor of Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit. When they dance to express their beliefs, to share traditions, or to honor people, all the members of the tribe are part of the dance. Even the people standing around the circle in which the dances are performed are part of it. Mothers may hold babies, people may chat and gossip, but everyone helps the dancers by praying and shouting approval and applauding. In that way, **all the members of the tribe participate in the dance.**

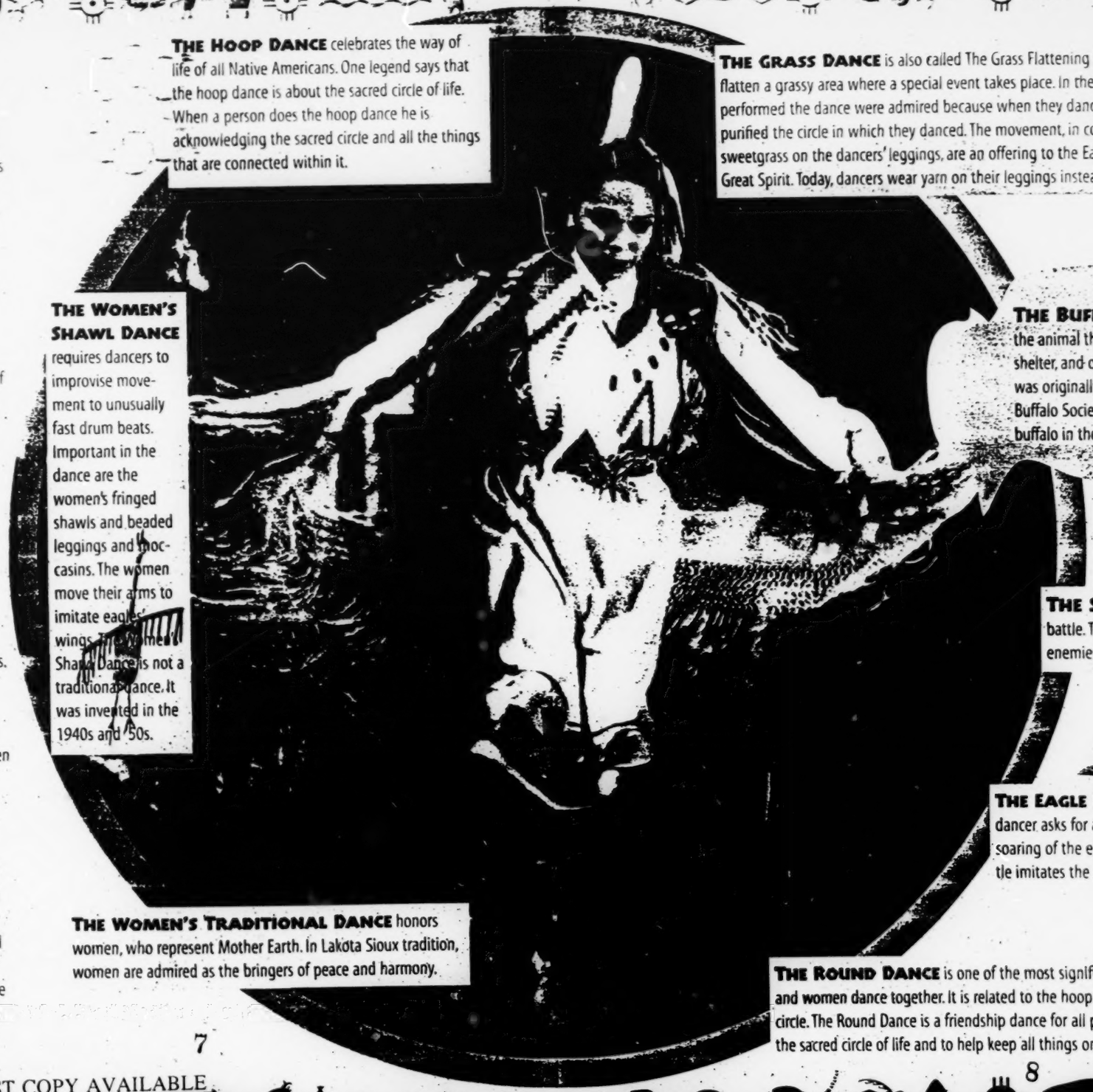
When the dancers perform in front of audiences in theaters, things are different. The dancers are sharing their traditions with and telling about their history to nontribal audiences. Since they perform on a stage rather than in the sacred circle on their reservations, **a narrator explains the dances** so that the audience will understand them. When dances are performed for other Lakota Sioux, everyone understands their meaning because they have grown up participating in them.

AT THE PERFORMANCE of the Lakota Sioux Indian Dance Theatre, the narrator will explain the meaning of each dance. He will also discuss important ideas about the history and beliefs of the Lakota Sioux. The dancers will sometimes sing while they dance. Some members will play the flute and drum. There are many kinds of dances performed by the Lakota Sioux Indian Dance Theatre. A few of them are described on these pages.

THE HOOP DANCE celebrates the way of life of all Native Americans. One legend says that the hoop dance is about the sacred circle of life. When a person does the hoop dance he is acknowledging the sacred circle and all the things that are connected within it.

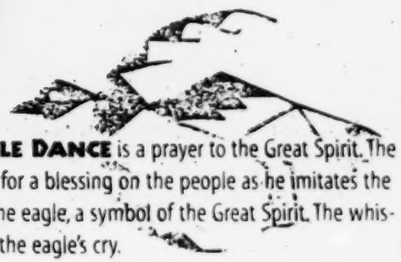
THE GRASS DANCE is also called The Grass Flattening Dance. The dancers flatten a grassy area where a special event takes place. In the past, those who performed the dance were admired because when they danced they cleansed and purified the circle in which they danced. The movement, in combination with the sweetgrass on the dancers' leggings, are an offering to the Earth Mother and to the Great Spirit. Today, dancers wear yarn on their leggings instead of sweetgrass.

THE WOMEN'S SHAWL DANCE requires dancers to improvise movement to unusually fast drum beats. Important in the dance are the women's fringed shawls and beaded leggings and moccasins. The women move their arms to imitate eagle wings. The Women's Shawl Dance is not a traditional dance. It was invented in the 1940s and '50s.



THE BUFFALO DANCE honors the animal that gave the Lakota Sioux food, shelter, and other means of survival. This dance was originally performed by members of the Buffalo Society, all of whom had dreamed of the buffalo in their vision quests.

THE SNEAK UP DANCE reenacts a battle. The dancers depict warriors stalking their enemies.



THE EAGLE DANCE is a prayer to the Great Spirit. The dancer asks for a blessing on the people as he imitates the soaring of the eagle, a symbol of the Great Spirit. The whistle imitates the eagle's cry.

THE WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL DANCE honors women, who represent Mother Earth. In Lakota Sioux tradition, women are admired as the bringers of peace and harmony.

THE ROUND DANCE is one of the most significant dances in which men and women dance together. It is related to the hoop of the nation and the sacred circle. The Round Dance is a friendship dance for all people to join in to complete the sacred circle of life and to help keep all things on earth in balance.

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THE LAKOTA SIOUX INDIAN DANCE THEATRE

The Lakota Sioux Indian Dance Theatre, produced by The Solaris Lakota Project, tours with approximately 12 to 15 American Indians who **perform dances, songs, and ceremonies that have been part of their culture for centuries.** The Dance Theatre shares its work by traveling throughout the world. The members of the company are eager for everyone to see the beauty of their culture.

The Lakota Sioux Indian Dance Theatre was founded on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota in 1978. Henry Smith, the artistic director, worked closely with Sioux leaders, who helped him decide what dances to perform and how to present them for both Indian and nontribal audiences. Mr. Smith is not an American Indian, but he has been so devoted to learning about and sharing the culture through the dance of the Lakota Sioux that he has been adopted by some tribal families. He became interested in Lakota Sioux dance traditions when he was teaching dance in a school on a South Dakota reservation.

The narrator is a respected elder and storyteller. Sometimes the narration is provided by Albert White Hat, who helped make the film "Dances With Wolves." Sometimes it is provided by Lance White Magpie, a descendant of Chief Crazy Horse, or by Marian One Star, a consultant on tribal customs.

The musicians in the company are Gabe DesRosiers, the lead singer of Northern Wind, a group that performs at many powwows, and Brian Akipo, a traditional flute player. Lead dancers are Marian One Star, Jessie Spotted Tail, Grace Her Many Horses, Leon Thompson, Lance White Magpie, and Lillian and Ron Good Eagle.

Narrator

Above: **Grass Dance.**
Right: **Men's Traditional Dance.**

Photos by Sakari Viika

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LOOKING AND LISTENING

Attending a performance by the Lakota Sioux Indian Dance Theatre will be interesting and enjoyable for everyone if you

REMEMBER...

- the dances allow us to experience something about the Lakota Sioux way of life.
- the dances are about such things as the sacred hoop, the buffalo, and the eagle.
- that the Lakota Sioux believe that dance is an important part of the sacred circle of life.
- dance must be watched closely in order to see the patterns of movement.

WATCH...

- how the dancers use the space of the stage: one place or many; close together or far apart.
- how the dancers' movements are usually close to the ground.
- how the dancers start and stop exactly on the beat.
- how the dancers show energy: fast, slow; calm, exciting.
- for objects such as eagle feather fans and horse dance sticks.

Round Dance

LISTEN...

- how the drum beats fit the dances.
- for the one special time in each dance when four beats are sounded loudly and the dancers turn four times. (The four beats represent the four directions of the compass, which are part of the sacred circle of life.)
- for rhythms.
- for singing.

CREATE A DANCE that expresses something you are grateful for. Choose music that goes well with your dance. Practice the dance. Perform it for classmates, friends, or your family. Explain to them what you are grateful for and why.

IMAGINE that you are a dance critic for a newspaper or magazine. Write a 200 word review of the Lakota Sioux Indian Dance Theatre. Tell what dances were performed and what they mean. Offer your opinion about how well they were performed and how they made you feel.

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FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND NATURE'S CYCLE

Family Structure

Members of the traditional Lakota Sioux tribe lived in close-knit families. The work of both men and women was necessary to the survival of the family. However, they had different responsibilities.

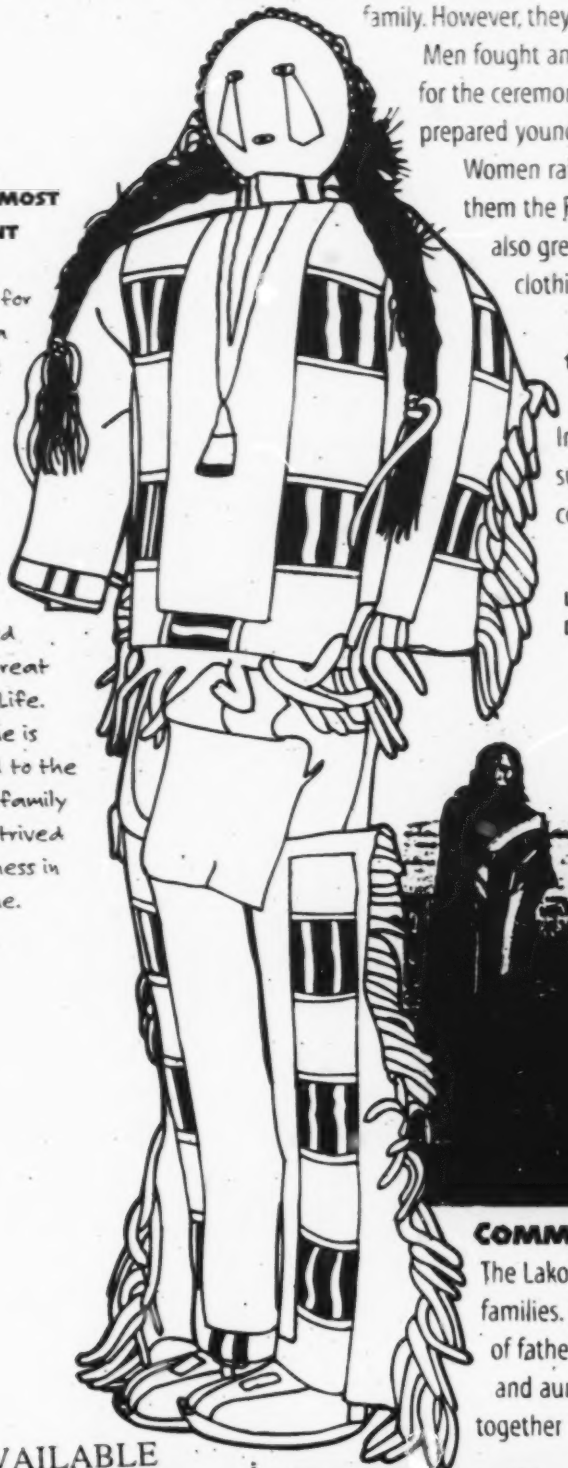
Men fought and hunted. They were responsible for the ceremonies and rituals. They also prepared young men for their vision quests.

Women raised the children and taught them the Four Great Virtues of Life. Women also grew crops, made tepees and clothing, and cared for the sick.

Families passed on tribal beliefs and skills for survival. In this way, Lakota Sioux made sure that the circle of life would continue.

WHAT ARE FOUR IMPORTANT VIRTUES you want to develop? Draw a shield divided into four sections. Write one quality in each section. Then draw a picture for each quality that explains what the quality means to you.

THE FOUR MOST IMPORTANT HUMAN QUALITIES for the Lakota Sioux were bravery and fortitude, generosity and wisdom. These were called the Four Great Virtues of Life. Each virtue is connected to the others. All family members strived for worthiness in each virtue.



Lakota Doll, 1880.
Denver Art Museum

National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Community

The Lakota Sioux community was made up of groups of many families. **Each group was an extended family** of fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, grandparents, cousins, uncles, and aunts. Men and women had different jobs, but they worked together for everyone's benefit.

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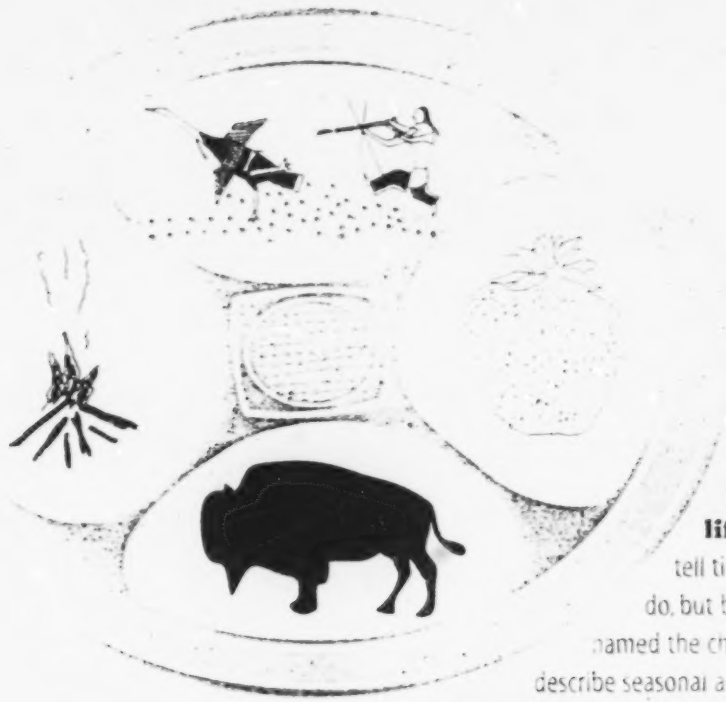

NATURE'S CYCLE

To Native Americans, **the seasons were part of the great circle of life.** The Sioux did not tell time by the sun, as we do, but by the moon. They named the changing moons to describe seasonal activities.

SPRING began in our month of April and was known as "Moon of the Birth of Buffalo Calves." In the spring, families left their winter camps and began gathering food and hunting, though they allowed the buffalo to fatten until fall.

SUMMER began in our month of June, which was known as "Moon When Strawberries Are Ripe." At the beginning of summer, men went on vision quests to seek personal guardian spirits. Also in the summer, all the Sioux tribes met and arranged their tepees in circles. For four days they purified themselves. For the next four days they celebrated the sacred Sun Dance ceremony.

FALL began in our month of August, which was known as "The Harvest Moon." It was the most important hunting season of the year. The men killed enough buffalo for the meat to last through the long, frozen winter. The women made pemmican from the meat.

WINTER began in our month of November, which was known as "The Winter Moon." As the snow began to fall, families settled into winter campsites. Men and boys repaired tools while women and girls sewed, decorated clothing, and made dolls. At night, stories were told around the tepee fire. Soon it would be spring, and the circle of seasons would begin again.

MAKE A WALL CALENDAR using the Lakota Sioux names of the moons of the year. Illustrate what the names mean. Mark your birthday and the birthdays of your family and friends.

PEMMICAN is preserved deer meat that has been flattened and mixed with tallow (fat) and dried choke cherries. It is somewhat similar to modern-day "beef-jerky."

TEPEE: the dwelling of the Lakota Sioux. Tepees were always placed in a circle. The word tepee comes from the Sioux words "ti," meaning "dwelling," and "pi," meaning "used for."

...beautiful tepee
...like a good mother.
...he hugs her children
...o her and
...rotects them from
...ht and cold,
...ow and rain.
—Sioux proverb

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THE BUFFALO: A VALUED FRIEND

Millions of buffalo roamed free on the Great Plains before the white settlers moved west. The lives of the Lakota Sioux revolved around the hunt of the buffalo. They honored the animal's spirit and used all of its parts for their survival.

Between one and two hundred uses were found for the buffalo's body parts. The Sioux made tepees, blankets, clothes, ropes, shoes, and drumheads from buffalo skins. They made containers, such as cups and dishes, and gun-powder horns. Bones were used for needles. Because the Sioux did not make pottery, they used dried buffalo stomachs to store water and as containers in which to cook. Before the Sioux had horses, they disguised themselves in buffalo skins that still had the heads attached when they hunted the buffalo. Women kept count of the buffalo hides they prepared by carving small dots on the handles of the scrapers with which they did their work.

FIND OUT MORE about ways the Sioux used the parts of the buffalo. Make an illustrated chart showing the uses and share it with your classmates.

Some say there were as many as 12 million buffalo when settlers and gold prospectors arrived on the Great Plains. They destroyed the grass the buffalo ate. They turned many parts of the Great Plains into grazing and farm land. Worst of all, they killed millions of buffalo for sport. **By 1889, only 540 were still alive.** Today, 15,000 buffalo live in protected areas. Some others live in national parks. Several thousand are raised on private ranches and are sold for food.

YOU MAY WANT TO READ...

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Josephy, Jr., Alvin M. *500 Nations, An Illustrated History of North American Indians.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

MacDonald, Fiona. *Plains Indians.* Haupauge, New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1993.

Taylor, Colin. *The Plains Indian.* New York: Crescent Books, 1994.

Weatherford, Jack. *Indian Givers.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1988.

Wolfson, Evelyn. *The Teton Sioux: People of the Plains.* Brookfield, Connecticut: The Millbrook Press, 1992.

YOU MAY WANT TO SEE...

Last Stand at Little Big Horn. **"PBS: The American Experience" (60 minutes), WGBH Educational Foundation (Boston) and Thirteen/WNET, 1992.**

Live and Remember (Wo Kiksuye), 1987; Fulfilling the Vision (Oyate Iglukinipi), 1992; Come to the Center and Dance (Cokata Upo), 1994; (30 minutes each), available from Solaris Lakota Project, 264 West 19th Street, New York, NY, 10011.

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LAKOTA SIOUX INDIAN DANCE THEATRE

CUE SHEET

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